

Player: Videogame Interaction from Atari to Toys to Life

Perth Museum and Art Gallery, July-September 2016

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Overview

Within the last 5 years, institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Victoria & Albert Museum have sought to engage with game designers and developers in a bid to bring videogames into exhibition and gallery spaces.

These initial examinations of games as artistic and cultural artefacts have reflected the growing interest in videogames by curators, academics, and the wider public.

Player: Videogame Interaction from Atari to Toys to Life was an exhibition that aimed to contribute to this public discourse on videogames as cultural objects.

Right: A young visitor playing Line Wobbler by Robin Baumgarten at Perth Museum and Art Gallery (July 2016)





This exhibition of videogames was developed by **Perth Museum and Art Gallery** (Rhona Rodgers, JP Reid, Joanna Dick, Paul Ritchie) and **Abertay University** (Robin Sloan, Emilie Reed, and Gregor White).

The exhibition ran from July 7th to September 18th 2016. Initial research and planning for the exhibition was supported by a grant from the Association of Art Historians (AAH) under the Collaborative Museum Grant scheme (JP Reid and Robin Sloan).

Exhibition Aims

The initial aims of the exhibition were as follows:

- To explore a subject of contemporary, cultural relevance (namely videogames) and examine it in the wider context of culture, entertainment and technology.
- To contribute to the discourse on videogames as cultural objects.
- In line with institutions like Museum of Modern Art and the V&A, seek to engage videogame designers and industry specialists and tap into the creativity of the industry; providing an opportunity to share with the community and inspire visitors.
- Attracting new audiences (such as young people and families) and making them feel comfortable in the museum environment.
- To create visually dynamic and immersive space; given the fact that this display explores 'play' and 'physicality', the gallery will be bright, colourful, filled with sound, and representative of augmented virtual spaces.
- Whilst providing a general retrospective of popular gaming, this exhibition will also showcase experimental, concept and yet-to-be-released tech from developers and designers.



The proposed theme for the exhibition was physical interaction with digital games and, specifically, the history of the game controller. This theme informed the strategy for identifying, sourcing, and acquisitioning artefacts to display.

Abertay University's contribution involved: consultancy on games history, the development of a list of artefacts (non-interactive and interactive displays), the sourcing of artefacts (from Abertay and personal collections), communications with game developers (Robin Baumgarten, Sensible Object), producing text for displays and for the game development timeline, advising on exhibition design, assisting with installation, delivering a talk, and designing and hosting an open day of game demonstrations and teaching.

Left: The DK Bongos rhythm controller for Donkey Konga on Nintendo Gamecube

Exhibition Design

To explore the history of game controllers, the exhibition design include both traditional display cabinets (to show game products, controllers, and other materials) and playable exhibits (to provide visitors with an opportunity to experience a range of seminal and unique controllers from the past and present of game design).

The main displays included:

- A chronology of game consoles, with playable games. The emphasis of each interactive display was on the use of a novel or curious controller.
- A chronology of game controllers, from the Atari 2600 through to modern day hand controllers.
- A display of handheld game devices, from the Game Boy to the iPhone.
- Novel controllers and devices, from gun controllers to musical instrument controllers to virtual reality.
- Toys to Life as a major recent development in physical-digital interaction.
- An installation of the experimental game Line Wobbler, designed by internationally renowned game designer Robin Baumgarten. Line Wobbler had featured in previous gaming installations and exhibitions.
- A presentation of Beasts of Balance development materials and prototypes. The game was not released until after the close of the exhibition, and this was therefore presented as the cutting edge of contemporary physical-digital interaction in game design.

Sample Exhibition Photography

3RD GENERATION 1983-1987



1983: Nintendo Entertainment System
1985: Sega Master System

4TH GENERATION 1987-1993



1989: Nintendo Game Boy
1990: Sega Game Gear
1991: Super Nintendo
1992: Atari Lynx
1993: Sega Mega Drive

5TH GENERATION 1993-1998



1993: Atari Jaguar
1994: Sega Saturn
1995: Sony PlayStation
1996: Nintendo 64

6TH GENERATION 1998-2005



1998: Sega Dreamcast
1999: PlayStation 2
2000: Game Boy Advance
2001: Xbox
2002: Nintendo Game Boy Advance
2003: PlayStation 3
2004: Xbox 360
2005: Wii

Hand Controller Generations – Interactive Exhibits

Pictured: NES, SNES, Saturn, N64, PlayStation, Gamecube, PlayStation 3

Hand Controller Chronology

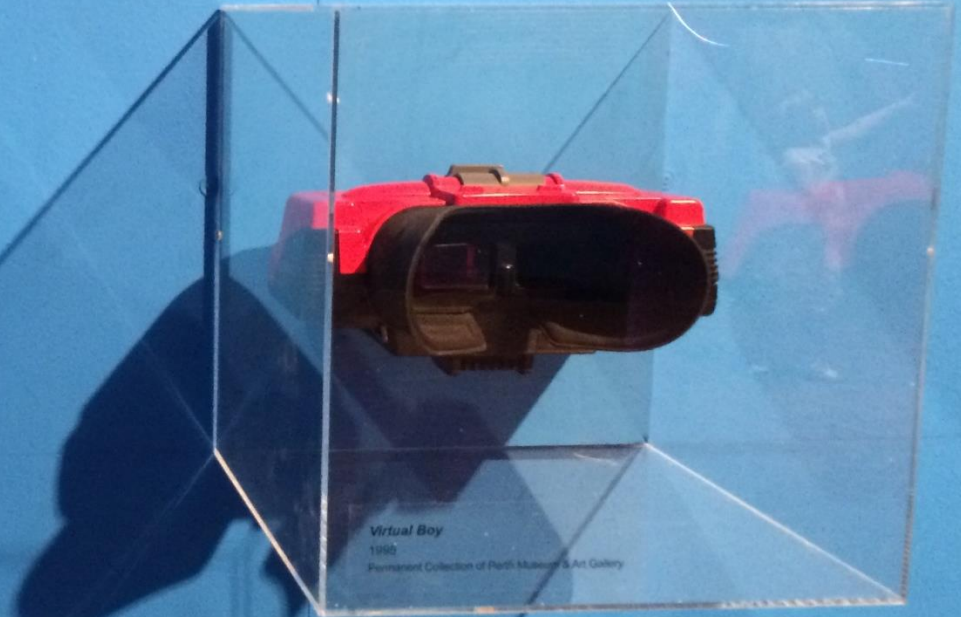
Display of the traditional hand controllers from
Atari 2600 to Xbox 360 (1977-2005)



VIRTUAL BOY

The black sheep of the Nintendo family, the Virtual Boy was meant to introduce a new age of 3D gaming. It didn't...

Nintendo released the 3D Virtual Boy in 1995 to poor sales and an overwhelmingly negative reception. It was heavily criticised for its limited use of colour, uncomfortable design, and high price. Despite the initial failure, it is considered a valuable collector's item today, and is a good example of Nintendo's experimental approach to games technology. In 2011 Nintendo released a successor 3D device: the hugely successful Nintendo 3DS.



Virtual Boy
1995
Permanent Collection of Perth Museum & Art Gallery

Example of a design curiosity:
the Nintendo Virtual Boy

EARLY VIDEOGAMES



1972 Atari release Pong
1972 Magnavox Odyssey

GE
19



1977 Atari 2600



Display of early controllers



Display of handheld consoles

Disney Infinity figures

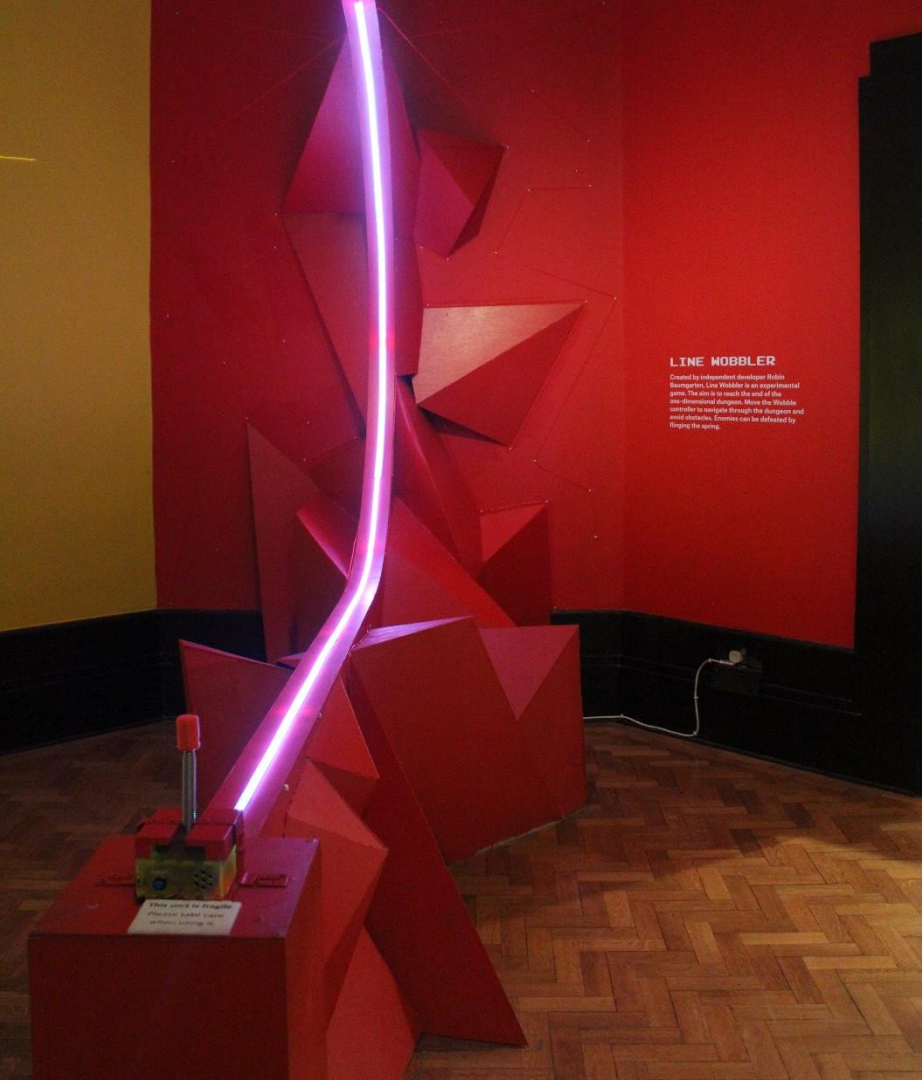
Featured as part of the display on Toys to Life



Display of Beasts of Balance (Sensible Object)



Installation of Line Wobbler (Robin Baumgarten) plus impact of installation on Twitter



Robin Baumgarten
@Robin_B

This is the most beautiful setup for Line Wobbler yet! At the Perth Museum in Scotland. Ridiculously well done!



24/09/2016, 09:59

65 RETWEETS 234 LIKES





Tech Day



On the 10th of September 2016, Abertay University ran an open day of playable games currently in development and games teaching. This event was advertised as the Tech Day.

Playable game prototypes included:

- IgKnight by Hyper Luminal Games
- Tides by Benthos Games
- Sugaropolis by Folk Tale Entertainment
- Glaze by Crowbar Games (later renamed Puny Astronaut)
- The Legacy by Figure of 8 Games

A bookable Raspberry Pi workshop was hosted during the day. This workshop aimed to teach young people fundamental programming concepts by using Raspberry Pi microcomputers to create custom physical controllers for Minecraft.

The event was designed and coordinated by Robin Sloan and Paul Robertson of Abertay University, with planning and organisation by Joanna Dick of Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

Left: Visitors playing games and speaking to game developers, including both Abertay University student developers and professional game developers

Tech Day Photography



Impact

Outcomes and Recognition

During the 10-week period of the exhibition, Perth Museum and Art Gallery recorded statistics and captured qualitative data relating to visitor numbers, demographics, and takings. At a closing meeting on 6th October 2016, the following outcomes were reported:

- A 58% rise in the number of visitors to Perth Museum and Art Gallery from the previous summer (16,900 visitors)
- A 33% rise in general public donations.
- Evidence of a more diverse audience compared with typical Perth Museum and Art Gallery visitor demographics. The demographics which saw a significant rise in visitor numbers were: teenagers, family groups, and men.
- Successful introduction of an exhibition entrance fee for the first time, which helped to recover the costs of running the exhibition.
- Prof. White delivered a talk (£2 ticket) which was well attended by all demographics, particularly younger audiences.
- Shop sales rose 578% compared with the previous summer.
- 482 families accessed the event via the What's On publication.
- 400+ people attended during the Tech Day, hosted by Abertay University.

The exhibition was nominated for the Enterprising Museum Award by Arts and Business Scotland.

Enquiries

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